

The Hope of the Resurrection

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[0 : 00] We're aware that we are in the COVID pandemic and our lives have been restricted for well over a year now. But we know that there is a route map out of lockdown.

In Scotland, they call it a route map. I think in England, they call it a road map, because in Scotland, we probably like to call things by different names and do things differently. But we're somewhere down the road in the route map or road map, and things are being eased across the UK.

So we've had no hugs, no haircuts, no holidays. Having said that, actually, David Trimble's got a nice fresh trim, so he has had a haircut. He's been to the barber. There have been no restaurants. There have been no pubs, no gyms.

But plenty social distancing, plenty hand washing, plenty mask wearing, and plenty homeschooling. And the reason for all of this has been death.

The reason for all the rules and regulations and restrictions is death. Our lives have been restricted because the coronavirus is a deadly virus.

[1 : 07] It kills people. But despite a route map that takes us through the coronavirus, death won't stop. Death will catch up with us all sooner or later.

One day, we will all take our last breath, whether it is through COVID or cancer or even in a comfortable nursing home. One day, we will all die.

And so while a government route map may take us through a pandemic, we need something more to take us through death. And yet, from our reading today, we don't actually need to fear death.

The Christian faith gives us certain hope in the face of death. And it's a hope that comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, what our Bible reading was all about.

Because through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we're told that death has been defeated. Which means the resurrection has enormous implications because all of us will die.

[2 : 13] And so it's got implications for our lives, but it also has implications for our world. A world where death won't go away. And that's why this Bible passage is so helpful for us.

Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the hope that we need to face the struggles of life, and there are many, but also to face the reality of death. And so the passage that we read today is a bit like God's route map for the future.

God has got a plan for what he's doing, and he lets us in on what he's doing so that we know how to live right now. And the engine that drives God's route map is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because the reality of the resurrection of Jesus gives hope to everybody who believes in him. And so let's look now at how we can have a realistic and an irrepressible hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So three things this afternoon. First of all, we see life without the resurrection. So that's in verse 12 to 19. Then secondly, life with the resurrection. Verse 20 to 28.

[3 : 23] And then thirdly, living because of the resurrection. So life without the resurrection. Life with the resurrection. And then living because of the resurrection. So first, life without the resurrection.

Paul's addressing a serious problem in the Corinthian church. So they were saying that there was no resurrection of the dead. Look at verse 12. But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Now before this, verse 1 to 11, Paul wrote about the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. And it's at the core of Christian belief.

Everything depends on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's what we call the gospel or the good news of Christianity. And yet despite the reality of the resurrection, some of the Corinthians were saying that people couldn't be resurrected from the dead.

Now why were they thinking like this? Well, like any of us, they were influenced by their culture. So many of their ideas in Corinth came from Greek philosophy, where it was thought that the soul and the body carried on after death.

[4 : 40] And so throughout Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he addresses this low view that they have of the body. And so this concept of physical existence after death was inconceivable to the Corinthians.

So it wasn't that they couldn't accept the resurrection of Jesus. Paul says they believed it in verse 11, but they ruled out the possibility of them actually rising from the dead.

And so Paul writes to challenge the absurdity of their thinking, because the resurrection of Jesus connected to the resurrection of the believer.

So he says in verse 13, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. So it's a big deal if you believe there's no physical resurrection from the dead.

In other words, there's no future for us when we die, because it's a big deal, because if you get one aspect of Christianity wrong, like the resurrection, then the whole Christian faith collapses.

[5 : 48] And that's why Paul points out the wrong thinking the Corinthians had on the resurrection of the dead, because it brings the resurrection of Christ into question. And so four times in verse 12 to 19, Paul says that denying the physical bodily resurrection of believers implies a denial of the resurrection of Jesus.

And so what he does here is he expands on the tragedy of the Corinthians thinking. It's hopeless thinking. And he imagines what life would be like without the resurrection.

So verse 14, he says, and if Christ has not been raised, their preaching is useless, and so is your faith. So if Christ has not been raised, Paul's saying the preaching of the apostles and early Christians is useless.

Literally, he's saying it's empty. There's nothing to say. It's worthless. Because if this core element of the resurrection is removed, then there's no good news to proclaim.

And so the implication is that the Christian faith is useless. Why would the Corinthians, or why would anyone today for that matter, why would anyone believe in the Christian faith if Jesus didn't rise from the dead?

[7 : 03] Makes no sense. And so Paul continues his argument, verse 15 and 16. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

But he did not raise him if, in fact, the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. So he's saying, if Christ has not been raised, the apostles are liars.

They're wrong. So the Christian faith is just one big hoax. And then he goes on, verse 17 and 18. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you're still in your sins.

Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. So if Christ has not been raised, then faith in Christ is futile. It's worthless, pointless, senseless.

There's no point in putting your faith in Jesus if he didn't rise from the dead. You're wasting your life believing in Christianity if there's no resurrection. So Paul says the implication is, well, our sins can be forgiven.

[8 : 11] Because if the core belief of Christianity is that Christ died for our sins, that's one of the core elements of the Christian faith. And it didn't happen. If he didn't rise from the dead, then we can't be forgiven.

And so he says those who died trusting in Jesus are lost forever if there's no resurrection. If Jesus wasn't raised to life, Paul's saying there's no point being a Christian.

There's no faith to believe, no Christian faith that's worth believing. There's no forgiveness for sins, and there's no future hope either.

And so without the resurrection, life is hollow, helpless, and hopeless. And so it's hardly surprising that Paul summarizes what he's saying with these words in verse 19.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. So Christians, you, me, if we profess to believe in Jesus, are to be pitied if our hope only stretches as far as this life until we die.

[9 : 20] Paul's saying if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, there's no hope through death. In that case, we are sad, sorry cases if Christianity is nothing more than a cruel hoax dreamt up by liars to give hope to gullible fools.

So life without the resurrection, Paul says, is absurd. And it's not just Paul who tells us this. Cultural commentators today continue to recognize that Christianity is useless and worthless if Jesus didn't rise from the dead.

There's no point to it without the reality of the resurrection. So listen to what was said in the Easter special of The Spectator, Spectator News magazine last week, which incidentally had a fantastic picture on the cover of an empty tomb.

But this is what a writer called James Mumford said. His article was called Believe It or Not. He said, The church can go along with the market mentality and make people feel it's meeting their needs.

Or it can say, Something utterly extraordinary has taken hold of us. Come and see. Ultimately, transformation is what Easter is about. A man bodily raised from the dead and returning in his new body, neither corpse or ghost, to have breakfast with his friends.

[10:43] This life after life after death, as it has been termed, was a completely novel idea which became the basis of a hope that changed everything.

And it's great to read that in a secular news magazine because it acknowledges that the resurrection of Jesus gives the best hope for our modern world.

Whatever people put their hope in, it's never as good a hope. It never promises as much to us as the resurrection of Jesus. Because the resurrection of Jesus is a hope that changes everything for our own life, but also for our world.

Because if there's no God, then there's no resurrection, then there's no hope in the face of death. And so without the resurrection of Jesus, this brief life that we have is all there is.

This material world is all there is. And there's nothing more and there's nothing better. In which case, you've got to find your own meaning and your own purpose aside from Christianity.

[11:49] And so the best you can hope for in this life is some kind of this world happiness. Whether it's in success, money, comfort, or in loving relationships.

But even if you achieve happiness in all of these things, death is only going to destroy it all anyway. And it will all be taken away or will be taken away from all of it.

And so you can see why Paul wants to show that if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, then there is no hope. No hope for Christians, but no hope for anyone. Because we'll struggle through life and we'll lose everything when we die if there's no resurrection from the dead.

But the good news is there is a flip side to what Paul is saying. So in a sense, he gives the bad news by saying if there is no resurrection, this is what life is like. But then he flips it around and says, but there is a resurrection.

And so this is what life is like. He wants to outline the hopelessness of life without the resurrection so he can then show the beauty of life with the resurrection.

[12:57] It gives hope to us and to our world. So that's the first point, life without the resurrection. Second point, life with the resurrection in verse 20 to 28. And what Paul does is he turns to this fantastic hope that Christianity offers because Jesus did rise from the dead.

So the resurrection of Jesus has kick-started the resurrecting work of God, which will continue and then will reach its climax when Jesus returns and God restores the entire cosmos.

And that's the promise of the resurrection. So in contrast to the hopelessness of life without the resurrection, Paul's emphasis shifts with this word, but, in verse 20, but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Now isn't that just such a great way to think of death as sleep? Yes, death is painful, death is cruel and sad and hard, we know that, but because Christ was raised from the dead, death is just like sleep for Christ's people.

That's why death is not the end. It's like the awakening to a new dawn with a resurrection life to come. And that's why Jesus here is described as the first fruits.

[14:24] And that's an agricultural term, first fruits, meaning the first fruits of the harvest, the initial portion of the crop, and the first fruits, of course, signals that the harvest is sure and certainly going to come and it will bloom and it will blossom and it will all be there because we've seen the first fruits.

And so Paul's saying this is what happens with the resurrection of Christ. Jesus as the first fruits and his resurrection from the dead signals the certainty of a harvest full of resurrected believers in Jesus.

Because the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of those who are in Christ can't be separated, the resurrection of Jesus has set this process in motion guaranteeing that there is far more to come.

So Jesus is the first to be raised from death so that all who belong to him will follow in his wake. And so Paul is reinforcing this by comparing Christ with Adam.

Verse 21 to 23. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

[15 : 46] But each in turn Christ the first fruits, then when he comes those who belong to him. So death was introduced to the world through this one man, Adam, the first human being.

But the resurrection of Christ begins a new humanity, a new people. And it's the reversal of death that came through Adam.

So Paul's saying Adam represents the whole human race where sin has affected all its descendants. That's every human being. And that's why our union with Adam means we're all subject to death, that we all will die.

But Paul's saying Christ is the representative or the head of this new humanity. So his death and resurrection also affect all who believe in him.

That's what union in Christ is about. We had a great series of sermons by David on union with Christ and that's what Paul is saying here. You will be united with Adam and death or you'll be united with Christ for life.

[16 : 56] Because our union with Christ means we're no longer subject to death. Instead, we participate because we're united with him in his resurrection by being resurrected ourselves.

So instead of eternal death by being in Adam, we can enjoy the prospect of eternal life by being in Christ. And his resurrection from the dead is a guarantee of our resurrection when we trust in him. But Paul has got a far broader vision than just the bodily resurrection of people like you and me. His vision goes beyond the individual and their life through death. Because the resurrection of Jesus demonstrates the rule and reign of Jesus where God's plan, God's root map if you like, is not just about restoring our bodies when we're dead, but it's about restoring everything that God has made.

So look at verse 24 to 26. Then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

[18 : 09] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. So Paul's vision here is towards the end of time when Christ will finally destroy all the consequences of sin.

Because through Christ's resurrection, a great reversal is taking place. It started to happen through the resurrection of Jesus. And in this great reversal at the end of time, Jesus will reestablish the kingdom of God and will put everything right again.

resurrection and he will hand over the kingdom of God the Father to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. So Paul's saying this process, this great reversal has already started, begun in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So at the cross, Jesus defeated sin and death, and then through being raised to life again, Jesus is the first fruits of this unstoppable restoration of the entire cosmos, the entire creation.

And so that's why we can be sure that one day Jesus will destroy all his enemies by putting them under his feet. And so right now, yes, death still reigns and it still causes havoc in our world and people will still die and there will be sadness and pain and suffering.

[19 : 43] But because death is the last enemy, it is an enemy that Jesus will one day destroy. And he'll destroy it once and for all.

And so the death and destruction that Adam introduced into the world will be eliminated by Jesus in this extreme makeover of the universe.

You've probably seen those extreme makeover shows on TV, either to do with a home or a house or somebody's face and they get an extreme makeover and they look completely different and far better than they did before.

Can you imagine the extreme makeover of the universe? The resurrection is the promise that it's coming and it will happen. I think Tolkien illustrates this really well in his notion in the Lord of the Rings of everything sad coming untrue.

because it's a vision of cosmic renewal that really mimics the hope that the resurrection gives. And so in the Lord of the Rings, spoiler alert, but after the ring is destroyed at Mount Doom, Sam wakes up from his sleep and he's surprised to find that he's alive and he's surprised to see Gandalf and then he says, is everything sad going to come untrue?

[21 : 05] What's happened to the world? And it's a recognition that the world is filled with sadness because it's cursed by sin and the consequence of sin, which is death.

But we're being told by Paul that through the resurrection, the sad things will come untrue. There will be this great reversal in this world and everything will be put right by Jesus.

and that's when Jesus, who has subdued everything that stood against God, will hand over the kingdom of God to his father, to God the father.

And in Jesus, it says, the son will submit himself to God, his father. So verse 27, for he has put everything under his feet. Now when it says that everything has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

When he has done this, then the son himself will be made subject to him, who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. So Paul's saying God's ultimate authority will be established for all eternity, never to be threatened again.

[22 : 24] There will be no more sin, no more death, and God will be all in all. God will be glorified in everyone and in everything. And so Paul's showing here how life with the resurrection is a foretaste of, and it gives a signpost toward God's full and final salvation.

So God is not just working in the gospel and the good news of Jesus. He's not just working to save our souls, or even our bodies for that matter. He is working to save and restore the whole created order.

And I don't know about you, but this is a comforting reminder that sickness, sadness, sorrow, suffering, death, don't get the last word.

And that's why the resurrection of Jesus is the fullest and it is the best hope for our world and for our lives. because it's this promise of the new creation and the life that we've always longed for but never had.

The resurrection promises that it will come. And so it's because of this tremendous hope that the resurrection of Jesus is a challenge. It's a challenge to what we believe and it's a challenge to how we live our lives right now.

[23 : 51] And that takes us to our third and final point. So first, life without the resurrection. Second, life with the resurrection. And third, living because of the resurrection.

Verse 29 to 34. So the resurrection of Jesus is a past reality and the resurrection of the believer is a future certainty.

And so it follows that there are practical implications for living life in this world right now in the present. And that's the focus in verse 29. So what does Paul say?

29. Now, if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?

Okay, so it's not clear what Paul is saying here. You can read multiple commentaries, which I have, with multiple suggestions and interpretations, but nobody can say for sure what Paul means.

[24 : 52] And so Paul seems to be referring to a practice that's not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament or in the Bible, but it sounds like some kind of baptism by proxy, where some in Corinth were being baptized on behalf of the dead.

And Paul is mentioning this, not because he approves of it, but to show that even if some people practice this, then it doesn't make any sense. It's a pointless exercise if there's no resurrection, just like living the Christian life.

It's a pointless and meaningless exercise if there's no resurrection. And that's why he says, verse 30, And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?

If I face death every day, yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus, our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?

If the dead are not to raise, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. So Paul's saying he preached this message, the good news of Jesus, his death and his resurrection, at great risk to his own life.

[26 : 02] He was in danger of losing his life because he followed Jesus. He was persecuted and he even fought wild beasts. And so he's saying, why would anyone do all of this?

What is the point? It is stupid and it is pointless putting your life in danger if the bodily resurrection of Jesus and by implication the bodily resurrection of believers isn't true.

Why risk your life? Why suffer persecution? Why make things difficult for yourself? Or these days, why go to church? Why sacrifice your time or sacrifice your money or face abuse because of what you believe?

Why try and avoid sin, temptation? Why bother trying to live a life that pleases God if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead?

Surely, if there's no hope of a resurrection, Paul's saying it makes more sense to agree with those people who say, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

[27 : 08] If there's nothing else, just live for now. Have a blast while it lasts. And that's exactly what many people do, isn't it? Live a life of reckless hedonism.

And why not? If there's no resurrection, then there's nothing to worry about. There's no consequences. We can sing along with John Lennon. Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try.

No hell below us, above us, only sky. Imagine all the people living for today. If there's no accounting for anything that you do in life or anything anyone else does in this world, then live for now and forget about the future.

And don't worry a bit about it. And yet, isn't that such a bleak and hopeless prospect and one that we don't actually want? Because there's no hope of justice, is there?

There's no hope of restoration. There's no hope of everything being put right. And so the resurrection, Paul's saying, should change the priorities of our lives right now.

[28 : 19] And that's why he's arguing with the Corinthians to say you need to keep this belief central. verse 33 and 34, do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character.

Come back to your senses as you ought and stop sinning, for there are some who are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame. He's urging them not to be misled by anyone in a culture that would undermine the reality of the resurrection.

And so the Corinthians, as we do, rubbed shoulders with people every single day who scoffed at the notion of the resurrection. And yet, Paul's saying their bad influence can rub off on God's people and can impact the lives of God's people.

And so Paul is urging the Corinthians to return to their senses and to stop sinning, because there's always going to be people who will mock you if you believe that Jesus died and rose again.

people who are, according to Paul, ignorant of God. And so whether back then, when Paul wrote these words, or today, now, people will think that you're off your head because you put your hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 42] But Paul's saying, don't lose sight of what's central. don't embrace the hopeless, illogical views in the world around you that offer happiness for a while, and yet it doesn't last.

Don't be ignorant by listening to the cynics and the skeptics who have nothing to offer. Don't let them rob you of your only hope in life and in death.

death. He's saying, you've got to hold on to your belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus and all that it signals, and then live in the light of it.

because Jesus rose from the dead, Paul saying, one day through faith you will be raised with him. And that is the motivation to live life right now for Jesus.

Because the resurrection doesn't just have implications for your life or your death, but for everything. And so if you don't have hope in the resurrection, the obvious question is, well, what are you putting your hope in?

[31 : 00] Where are you placing your hope for your life, for your death, and for eternity? What is your hope for this world that is going to beat the hope that comes through the resurrection of Jesus?

And yes, you might still have your doubts and your questions about the resurrection of Jesus, but you won't have anything more certain, anything more real to see you through life or through death. So the Christian faith tells us only Jesus gives us certain hope, and it's secured, it's guaranteed through his death and resurrection.

Jesus died to forgive our sins, and he rose to give us resurrection life. And when we know this, then our fears for our life and death, our fears for the situation we face in the world, will no longer trouble us.

Because our hope for our lives, our hope for our world, is certain through faith in Jesus and what he has already done.

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